



NEWS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE **BRUCE McPHERSON**

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California Secretary of State Bruce McPherson Signals Concerns About Looming Federal Election Law Deadlines

Help America Vote Act provisions for statewide voter registration and new voting systems take effect in six months

La Jolla, CA -- In prepared remarks today to Secretaries of State and election officials from throughout the United States gathered for a National Association of Secretaries of State Conference, California Secretary of State Bruce McPherson sounded his concern about a January 1, 2006 deadline for federal election law mandates included in the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA).

"The deadlines, in my mind, are secondary because we will be working on HAVA and the goals of election reform far beyond the deadlines set in the law and (after) the funding that came with it (is gone)," McPherson said. "And, in some ways, time has always been our enemy. The Help America Vote Act itself was waylaid, until national interest was channeled anew on the election process as states, in a rush to reform, encountered new challenges by converting, wholesale, voting systems statewide. Concerns about inadequate training for poll workers and insufficient voter education efforts led to new criticisms, but a familiar refrain – that voters were denied access to the ballot box. Ironically, it was that situation that gave new momentum and proved to be the final push needed to enact HAVA.

"We must remember that meeting our goals, achieving our outcomes, is paramount because when public perception about the elections process suffers, democracy suffers. It is a perception that may last a lifetime. So in a very real sense, the integrity of democracy is at stake. HAVA is about reforming elections and improving the democratic process. My first objective in California is restoring public trust in the Secretary of State's Office and the statewide, nonpartisan implementation of elections, and implementation of HAVA is the most critical component of keeping faith with the public. We cannot fall short in our efforts, and time is not on our side. Deadlines are only a means, a measuring stick, a milestone, to an end. We must never elevate the importance of a deadline above the goals of greater voter participation and electoral integrity. In the election field in particular, it is much more critical that we 'do it right' than it is to simply 'do it fast.'"

HAVA requires, among its many provisions, a statewide voter registration database with duplicate checking and identifying information, and that each polling place have at least one voting system that allows voters with physical limitations or disabilities to vote privately and independently.

California has more than 16.6 million registered voters, and an estimated 25,000 polling places throughout the state for each regularly scheduled federal election. These provisions would not apply to any statewide special election.

(Full text of speech attached)

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Secretary of State Bruce McPherson
Helping America Vote: A Summit on Election Reform II
June 10, 2005 Opening Remarks
Hilton Torrey Pines, La Jolla

Good afternoon. Welcome to California, welcome to San Diego County and welcome to La Jolla.

In Spanish, La Jolla means “the jewel.” This area of San Diego is a showcase for some of the best of our Golden State – the climate, the innovation and creativity, the quality of life...and, of course, the golf courses.

In many respects, California has become the epitome of the land of opportunity and bold dreams – it’s a state where visions become reality, where we make movies about going to Mars and then produce the Mars Rover that is even now exploring its landscape...

It is that spirit that makes California the number one destination for immigrants...a kind of Ellis Island of the West...and the first state in the nation to achieve “minority-majority status,” where no single ethnic group represents a majority, but collectively minority groups comprise the majority.

Our diversity is our strength, but it also represents a great challenge.

California has more than 16.5 million registered voters (out of almost 22.5 million eligible to register), twice as many registered voters as the next largest state (Texas). And if San Diego County were a state, it would rank number 34 in the nation, right behind Kansas, by virtue of its voting-age population of nearly 2 million.

But I can tell you, in case you haven’t noticed, you’re not in Kansas anymore; and if the esteemed Secretary of State from the great state of Kansas, Ron Thornburgh is here, I think he can attest to that.

California has diverse voters with unique needs. And they aren’t the same as the needs of voters in Kansas...or Kentucky...or Kalamazoo. That is my challenge as California’s new Secretary of State.

But everyone here today is operating under the same basic principles and we all have the same basic goals. That reality, that common purpose, was crystallized under the Help America Vote Act.

Every one of us here today, and those we represent, is a partner in the effort of election reform under HAVA – from our esteemed Election Assistance Commissioners to state election directors to county election officials...all the way down to the volunteer poll worker at the precinct level.

As colleagues and as partners in elections, we share a common purpose...and it's pretty simple: HAVA is about improving the administration of elections – to make the process more secure, more accurate, more accessible and more voter-friendly...

It's all about the outcomes. And my two most important goals, as California's Secretary of State are to ensure that:

No person eligible and willing to register to vote shall be prevented from doing so...

And no voter shall be disenfranchised...every legally cast ballot must be accurately counted.

But while the goals are easy to identify, it is difficult to put the ideals on which they stand into practice is difficult...

In California, on a single Tuesday, during a span of 13 hours, an army of more than 100,000 largely volunteer poll workers and hundreds of election professionals must be mobilized and work in concert to serve millions of voters who speak more than half a dozen languages in 25,000 precincts spread around this state...

Under an increasingly complex set of rules, both state and federal...

And we do it twice in an election year.

Elections are, at the most basic level, a human process...with millions of human interactions, all subject to human understandings and human misunderstandings...

In recent years, we perform this miracle of democracy under a microscope...

But, from my perspective, that scrutiny is appropriate and warranted...not because the job is not being done superlatively and professionally, but because this exercise we call Election Day is the highest expression of civic participation – voting...it is the essence of democracy...it deserves all the attention that it gets...because it is all about the voters...and delivering on the promise of HAVA means delivering for the voters...

I believe that everyone in this room is acutely aware that next year's federal election is the first during which the states will be operating under the full weight of federal mandates – for voting system standards and for voter registration lists, in particular...

And that's why I'm so focused on the goals.

The deadlines, in my mind, are secondary because we will be working on HAVA and the goals of election reform far beyond the deadlines set in the law....

And, in some ways, time has always been our enemy...

The Help America Vote Act itself was waylaid, until national interest was channeled anew on the election process as states, in a rush to reform, encountered new challenges by converting, wholesale, voting systems statewide.

Concerns about inadequate training for poll workers and insufficient voter education efforts led to new criticisms, but a familiar refrain – that voters were denied access to the ballot box. Ironically, it was that situation that gave new momentum and proved to be the final push needed to enact HAVA.

Despite that impetus, delays continued...in appropriating funds, in seating the EAC, and California's own set of unique circumstances under a prior Secretary of State, which have all conspired to turn what were challenges into a cause for grave concern...

As we confront these challenges together – especially the looming deadlines for creating a statewide voter registration list and deploying HAVA-compliant voting systems – we must remember that meeting our goals, achieving our outcomes is paramount because when public perception about the elections process suffers, democracy suffers. It is a perception that may last a lifetime. So in a very real sense, the integrity of democracy is at stake...

HAVA is about reforming elections and improving the democratic process...my first objective in California is restoring public trust in the Secretary of State's Office and the statewide, nonpartisan implementation of elections...and implementation of HAVA is the most critical component of keeping faith with the public...

We cannot fall short in our efforts and time is not on our side...

But together we can accomplish great things...our best opportunity to succeed will be our ability to recognize our common goals and our common obstacles...and to share our successes and our shortcomings as we move forward with HAVA implementation...so that we can all learn from each other...

In my 10 weeks as California's Secretary of State, I have experienced the benefits of this kind of partnership first hand. I know that the EAC emphasizes the Assistance in Election Assistance Commission by virtue of the interest they showed in providing the appropriate HAVA oversight, while recognizing the need to provide my state with the resources needed to fulfill HAVA mandates. The Department of Justice is generously providing assistance by helping us navigate the uncharted waters of HAVA's statewide voter registration requirements. The Department is providing valuable guidance and clarity. I'm grateful for those efforts. Believe it or

not, I'm even grateful for the EAC auditors going over my predecessor's books...they really are from the government and they are there to help me get California back on track.

Meeting the mandates is critical, including deadlines. And California has some catching up to do.

But deadlines are primarily a means, a measuring stick, a milestone, to an end. We must never elevate the importance of a deadline above the goals of greater voter participation and electoral integrity.

The Election Assistance Commission, as the HAVA clearinghouse for election information, the National Association of Secretaries of State and other long-standing, professional organizations must be our collective allies in this endeavor...

So, I look forward to working with NASS representatives next month in Minnesota as another opportunity to continue this dialogue...and I wish you all the best in your proceedings here in my home state...